

VZCZCXRO2070  
RR RUEHMA RUEHPA  
DE RUEHAB #1084 2701339  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 271339Z SEP 06 ZDK  
FM AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1964  
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS ABIDJAN 001084

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E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [ELAB](#) [EFIN](#) [PGOV](#) [IV](#)  
SUBJECT: COTE D'IVOIRE: BANK EMPLOYEES GO ON STRIKE

REF: A. ABIDJAN 812 B. ABIDJAN 1083

¶1. On September 27, the National Union of Employees of the Banking and Financial Establishments in Cote d'Ivoire (SYNABEFA-CI) went on strike for 72 hours, making good on a threat issued on July 25 (reftel A). To maximize the impact, the strike was evidently timed to coincide with the monthly deposit of salaries, making it impossible for salaried workers to withdraw their pay. The strike was unannounced, but since little progress had been made in negotiations between the union and industry management with regard to employees' demands for a pay review, it was not unexpected. (Note: As much as 80% of the banking sector is owned by French banking interests. Non French-owned banks here, such as Standard Chartered Bank and Citibank, have been hit by the strike as well, despite their reputation for paying better salaries than their competitors. End Note)

¶2. Comment: While it is not unusual in Cote d'Ivoire for a particular union to be on strike at any time, usually over demands for pay increases, this particular strike effectively targets everyone earning a salary in Abidjan, thus putting pressure on the government to facilitate a rapid solution. This strike, together with the air-traffic controllers strike (reftel B) and the threat announced today of a possible customs agents' strike next week could easily complicate an already tense political situation. End comment.  
Valle